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*Platon und die Aristotelische Poetik.* Von GEORG FINSLER.  
Leipzig: M. Spirgatis, 1900. Pp. 252. M. 6.

This study was published in 1900. But as it has been sent to this *Journal* for review and is an excellent piece of work it may not be too late to say a word of its merits and indicate a few points on which dissent is permissible. The principle that the best commentary on any work of Aristotle is an exposition of its relations to Plato, long recognized in theory, is gradually being applied in practice. What Burnet's admirably succinct commentary does for the *Ethics*, Finsler attempts in a different way for the *Poetics*. He shows how its ideas are developments or supplements, or conscious contradictions of the ideas of Plato, and how its very phrasing is colored by the passages of the *Republic*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedo*, and *Laws*, dealing with the theme.

Much of his exposition of Aristotle's definition of tragedy is for English readers anticipated by Butcher. To the central problem of *κάθαρσις* he devotes pp. 67-134. Aristotle's doctrine, he holds, is a defense of poetry against Plato by means of a development of Plato's own conception of the homeopathic cure of motion and emotion by themselves as illustrated in exercise, dancing, and the orgiastic music of the Corybants (*Laws* 790 D). To physical exercise Plato in one late passage (*Tim.* 89 A) gives the name *κάθαρσις* in the sense not apparently of purgation but of restoration of the natural order and harmony of the body. The aptest translation of Aristotle's *κάθαρσις* then is Goethe's "Ausgleichung." Aristotle extends this special Platonic sense of the word to *fear* and *pity*, excluding all other emotions by definition from the proper effect of tragedy.

This interpretation is worked out with much ingenuity and scholarship, and my only criticism of it is that it pins down both Plato and Aristotle to a greater precision of thought and language than the subject allows or it is probable that they consciously intended. As Butcher points out, the genitive with *κάθαρσις* may refer either to the thing purged away or the person or thing on which the purgation operates. And the effect of the purgation may be conceived (1) literally as the mere relief caused by the alleviating discharge, (2) as a sort of religious lustration, (3) as a moral or aesthetic purification and refinement. All these meanings may have been present to the minds of Plato and Aristotle, and we have no evidence that enables us to confine them to one with intentional exclusion of the others. The merely medical purgation is so intimately associated with the restoration of the health and harmony of bodily functions that it is impossible to keep the two meanings distinct. Plato undoubtedly, both in the *Laws* and the *Timaeus* speaks of exercise as not only the best natural cathartic but as directly calming and quieting irregular and unhealthy internal movements. The language of

the *Timaeus* passage is further colored by the comparison with the universe, to which purgation proper cannot apply (88 E). But the phrase τὰς τῶν σίτων τροφὰς καὶ ποτῶν κατακρατοῦντα in the *Laws* 789 D, and the comparison with τὸ τῆς φαρμακευτικῆς καθάρσεως in *Timaeus* 89 B, show that the idea of separation or excretion predominant in *Sophist* 226-27 is not far from Plato's mind, and forbid our attributing to him in the *Timaeus* passage a new and special meaning of the word. The same physical connotation is apparent in Aristotle's κομφίζεσθαι μεθ' ἡδονῆς. Farther than this we cannot go. But modern interpreters will always try to go farther. They will either insist with the vigor and rigor of Bernays that medical purgation, and that only, is meant, or they will follow the natural instinct of poets and literary critics to dwell rather on the resultant effects of purification and refinement. As Finsler himself says, critics have always read their own theory of poetry into the Aristotelian formula. Those for whom poetry is a safety-valve for latent unsatisfied sensibilities will insist on the purgation; and they have this in their favor that it constitutes the most direct and effective reply to Plato's objection in *Republic* 606 B that poetry fosters ἰσχυρὸν τὸ ἐλεεινόν. Those who prefer to think of poetry as spiritualizing and elevating feeling will emphasize rather the indirect after-effects of the purgation. Of these with a difference is Butcher, who takes the κάθαρσις to be the refining away from pity and fear of the alloy of personal reference which they have in real life. The majority of modern poet-critics from Milton to Browning blend both ideas.

We have really no means of determining whether Aristotle consciously defined in either sense his vague<sup>1</sup> metaphor as physical alleviation or spiritual purification, or whether, like the majority of modern interpreters, he wavered between both ideas unable to renounce either. The literature of the κάθαρσις question will therefore continue to grow.

There are many other points that it would be interesting to discuss with Dr. Finsler—his rejection of the *Ion*, his assumption that the *Phaedrus* represents a less mature stage of Plato's thought than the *Republic*, his statement that Aristotle in the introduction to the *Metaphysics* (981 a 26) contradicting Plato (*Rep.* x. 601 A) attributes to the true "Künstler" knowledge of the concepts and causes of the things that he portrays, which surely is a confusion of the τεχνίτης or scientific craftsman of whom Aristotle is speaking with the artist in the aesthetic sense. But the time is past for a complete and formal review of his book, and I merely wish to call attention to it again as one to which every student of the subject will assign an honorable place on the shelf that holds Butcher and Vahlen.

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<sup>1</sup> κάθαρσιν τινα. Butcher I think errs in referring this τινα explicitly to the distinction between tragic and orgiastic κάθαρσις.